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A HIGH-SCHOOL LIBRARY IN ACTION

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The Gilbert School at Winsted, Connecticut, a heavily endowed day-school under private management, but free to all townspeople, contains "one of the best-organized libraries for school purposes in the United States. There are about 12,000 volumes, with yearly accessions of new books amounting to between four hundred and five hundred volumes, together with about thirty of the best weekly and monthly periodicals."¹

The library is a well-lighted attractive room. Because of the rapid growth of the school the tables are a little crowded and nearly all the wall space is in use. The pictures are good, especially "The Evolution of the Book." The bulletin board is well stocked with propaganda and bait. Occasionally fresh flowers enliven the intellectual atmosphere.

School begins at nine, but at eight-thirty the library is a place of anxious activity. Several students are fluttering about, seeking important last-minute bits of information. Forte or pianissimo remarks are frequent:

What was the Ananias Club? We're studying Roosevelt and I know he used the name.

I've spent two hours on my speech and yet I haven't found the closing illustration that I want. Ah! This cartoon on the bulletin board gives me an idea.

Miss Wilde, I have fourth period vacant. Will you please find me some material on Gothic architecture? I have a special topic in history.

Shucks! I never can get hold of the *Readers' Guide*, and I have just ten minutes to finish my bibliography on universal military training.

O, Miss Wilde, Miss Browning wants to know if she can have the *Ivanhoe* blue-prints the third period.

¹ *The Gilbert School Catalogue*, 1919-20.

There are always one or two people getting their first look at the morning paper, and a few who are drawing books for future reading. Always, too, some teacher comes in for eleventh-hour preparation, or stops for a bookish chat with a pupil, or perhaps gives a bit of timely help to a belated virgin in search of oil.

Throughout the day the school library is meeting demands upon it; in fact, it frequently does not sleep nights, as the teachers have access to it at all times. It is also open two afternoons and evenings to the general public, thus supplementing the town library. A variety of glimpses will give an idea of its importance as a center of school activity.

The library has unexpected uses in different subjects. For instance, a mathematics class studies geometric designs and makes a school monogram; the mechanic arts class is referred to the book *How We Are Sheltered*; a commercial geography student looks up "sesame" and finds the reason for Ruskin's book-title; the boys use the *Scientific American* to prove their point in a pseudo-scientific discussion in English—the teacher having unwarily walked into a pitfall. *System* is a magazine much used by the commercial students. The household arts and music classes have their tempting reference material: among the recent accessions are a new book of the opera and one on etiquette.

In English and history the library is as essential as chemicals to the chemist or apparatus to physics demonstration. The history classes weave a rich background from reference reading and from special topics given orally before the class. A large revolving bookcase, given over to the history teacher, is filled with books pertaining to some phase of the class work: for example, a shelf marked "Modern European History" may contain narratives of the Protestant Reformation or biographic material on Napoleon. The pupils have free access to all shelves, and a chance to explore inviting by-paths while they also continue the main highway of their subject.

The English teachers have similar reference shelves. A few titles may be suggestive. Bulfinch's *Age of Fable*, various translations of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Gayley's *Greek Myths*—these and others are on the first-year English shelf. The pupils acquire a

first-hand acquaintance with them that is entirely improbable without class reference. For the study of *Ivanhoe* there is all the wealth of material on chivalry to draw from. Here (as elsewhere) the use of abundant pictures, diagrams, and fine illustrated editions adds to the interest appreciably. When it comes to *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Lays of Ancient Rome*, the children are treated to a shelf full of interesting and youthful poetry: Riley, Stevenson, "John Gilpin's Ride," old ballads, Longfellow, "The Courtin," and even *The Book of Golden Numbers*, which gives several Freshmen a chance to know juvenile favorites that have been overlooked in their earlier education. I must mention here "The Cataract of Lodore," which never fails to please Freshmen; they gain a new interest in and respect for the mechanics of poetry and a new delight in rhythm.

Early in the Freshman year the English classes begin a series of library lessons given to Freshmen and Sophomores by the librarian (who has had teaching experience) until the pupils have adequate training in methods of using the library. The mere names of these lessons will show their inestimable value.¹

FRESHMAN YEAR

1. Explanation of how to register. How to borrow and return books. Library rules. Deportment in the library. Care of books.
2. The book: its parts, title-page, index, contents, etc. How to open a book.
3. Dewey decimal classification. Ten main classes. Explanation of R and J.
4. The card catalogue. Author, title, and subject cards.
5. Shelf arrangement. Special collections, bound magazines, reference books, etc.
6. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases. Good and bad points of each.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

1. Brief review of classification. Brief review of catalogue.
2. Periodical indexes.
3. Biographical dictionaries, gazetteers, Connecticut and local reference books, historical reference books.
4. Index to poetry, short-story index, portrait index, quotations, proverbs, etc. Concordances.
5. Reference books not previously taught.
6. The making of a bibliography. Aids in book selection. U.S. catalogue. A.L.A. aids.

¹This list was furnished by Miss Frances Hobart, former librarian of the school.

Lately these lessons have been given in the library rather than in the classrooms, an obvious advantage. A library question is included in the regular school tests—a wise provision, to put this on the same basis as other English work. Each lesson is followed by exercises to be completed within a few days. Thus the pupil puts into immediate practice what he has learned.

It is amusing to walk into the library just after these lessons. The bewildered Freshmen are a group of lost souls who have to be rescued and shown that the very books they wanted are right under their hands; their chief aptitude is for sheeplike huddling over a book or shelf they see someone else working at. But they soon become independent and after a few lessons step out confidently to solve a new problem.

The results of these lessons are early apparent. The Freshmen soon learn how to find books by the Dewey system and can rummage through the stacks without supervision. When they are reading *Old Greek Folk Stories* and the teacher wishes to supplement these by stories of the Argonauts, all that is necessary is to ask a girl to look up the reference; she is able to find it easily and quickly.

This illustrates one of the most important features of a library in close connection with classroom work—immediateness. A need arises suddenly and is promptly and adequately met. In a class in American history when General Sheridan was discussed, several pupils showed a hazy memory or ignorance of Reed's poem. The teacher sent to the library for it and read it to the class; thus the association was immediate and correspondingly impressive. Usually references can be looked up during the period in which a question arises, statements can be constantly verified, and unforeseen difficulties cleared up. Otherwise, these matters would often be left at loose ends and inefficiently attended to, or lost in the mass of things left undone.

At the Gilbert School there is a system of weekly themes, oral and written alternating. During the Freshman year the pupils are encouraged to give oral themes on local history: Israel Putnam, the Barkhamsted lighthouse, the judges' cave, the early settlement of Winsted. The library material along this line is plentiful and—note this!—adequately classified and therefore easily accessible.

During the study of American literature the students use Pace's book of readings as a text, but do a great deal of reference work. In the Senior year a survey of English literature is actually possible with such a library, for the student gains his knowledge of Chaucer from *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Modern Reader's Chaucer*, his knowledge of moralities from selected plays, of eighteenth-century poetry from the poems, rather than from a study of the progress of literature by means of prosy abstracts and criticisms administered in cramming doses. Long, Bates, and Halleck appear, to be sure, but in their proper characters as auxiliaries and not as usurpers of the place of literature itself.

Through a study of Stevenson the pupils meet other writers of sketches and familiar essays, especially contemporary writers. The contemporary readings recommended should be carefully selected and should not take the place of classics that have stood the test of time. Yet so much of a pupil's mental environment is furnished with writings of the day that he should know how to choose and measure these. Though he may be slow to enjoy association with authors of an older generation, many a young American can be led into companionship with the writers on present-day affairs; this contact once made, it is possible to arouse an interest in earlier literary classics.

This same method is successful with modern poetry. Collections such as Miss Rittenhouse's two volumes of *Modern Verse*, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, *High Tide*, and *The New Poetry* are worth while. Few are the pupils who will not respond to "Da Leetla Boy" (Daly), "The Highwayman" (Noyes), "General William Booth Enters into Heaven" (Vachel Lindsay). You can bait the boys with Kipling and Service, the girls with *Ann Rutledge* (Masters), *The House and the Road* (Peabody), and *Songs for My Mother* (Branch).

The Gilbert library is well stocked with periodicals in constant use by teachers and pupils. Occasionally for English work each pupil reads and reports on a magazine, giving and getting new enjoyment. Although there are many collections of short-stories in the library, the current and bound magazines are an indispensable source of supply. This is also true of essays; in this case the pupil

benefits greatly by becoming conscious that a magazine exists for him aside from its stories. Such an investigation of periodicals cannot be made without a library, as only a few magazines will be at the command of private resources. That a variety of publications should be examined was once impressed upon me by the delight of a Senior girl at making friends with the *National Geographic Magazine*, which she had never before seen—except the cover. The current magazines and the *Reader's Guide* are constantly used in the preparation of oral themes and, of course, in debate work.

The daily newspaper, *The New York Times*, seldom has an idle moment. A metropolitan paper is a part of the equipment of any school library, but is particularly necessary in a community far from New York. I emphasize this because when I first gave a lesson on New York newspapers to a small-town group, one girl's remark illuminated an unsuspected dark corner: "I've never dared to tackle a New York paper because it was so big." The physical matter of terrifying size had been as formidable a barrier as not knowing where to find things. One of the chief advantages of the daily display in the library is that the pupil inevitably gets used to seeing a respectable New York paper. It becomes a habit, and the mighty force of familiarity may build up immunity against the yellow peril flaunted at him from every newstand.

During the short recess the Gilbert library is at its social best. A group at one table is excitedly compiling material for rebuttal speeches; there is always a boy or two poring over *Popular Mechanics*; a jolly committee is gathering jokes for a coming minstrel show. Here, a boy chuckling over the column "By the way" turns to the first one at hand to share his enjoyment. A few solitary readers are using their short time to advantage: fifteen minutes of isolation in a glorious romance, or an indignant perusal of an editorial rejoicing over the victory of a Democratic candidate. Best of all are the people who are browsing—drifting about among the stacks, stopping to pull out a book, dipping into a new magazine—just browsing, sometimes idly, sometimes profitably, and often in glad surprise happening on an undreamed-of source of interest.

At the close of the one session all is bustle in the library, for this is the time when everyone struggles at once to draw out books

—to the despair of the librarian and her assistant. Some have to hurry to catch the motor trucks for the towns near by, others are anxious to start off with their friends, all are ravenous with the usual one-thirty hunger. Soon the scramble is over and the boys and girls disperse with their books. In this final achievement of the day the library reaches out into the homes and links home and school together, to the educational upbuilding of both.